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STATINTL

Security And The Open Society

A Swedish Air Force colonel, recently tried and convicted as a Soviet espionage agent of long-standing, told his inquisitors that it was very easy to pick up American military secrets both in Washington and Moscow. Contacts with U.S. military men in a position to know important information "took no special effort," he said.

At this point it is probable that a number of people will start having palpitations about the sorry state of our security procedures, but while we see nothing to cheer about in the Swede's revelations, they do not discomfit us particularly. Ours is an open society in which military secrets — or secrets of any kind — are extremely difficult to keep. The only way to change this would be to change the nature of the society, and this would be akin to throwing the baby out with the bath water. In emulating the totalitarians for the sake of defeating them, we would simply be accepting defeat by the back door.

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WHAT THE free world, and particularly the United States, is seeking to preserve far more than national sovereignty is freedom for the individual in a libertarian civilization. This is exceedingly difficult under the best of circumstances, but would become impossible if we once decided that every national secret had to be protected at all costs. This can only be attempted in a police state, in which every man is the guardian of his neighbor's loyalty and in which every citizen is an informer.

Or, to return to the case of the Swedish spy for the Soviet Union, it would obviously be possible to

make it very difficult for any similar event to occur again. Our military men could be instructed never to have any contact with foreign nationals, friendly or unfriendly, unless an agent of the CIA or FBI were present. All military installations could be walled off from public view, with no one allowed on base except after the most elaborate security checks. Nothing could appear in the press or on television concerning our state of military preparedness or our plans for further arms development unless it had been given full clearance and review by military authorities. The automatic death penalty could be imposed for anyone violating any requirement of "national security" as defined by federal authorities.

This could be done, since it is already done inside Russia. It wouldn't really stop espionage, of course, although it would make it harder for the spies — just as it is hard for our intelligence apparatus within the Iron Curtain. It would seriously restrict a few basic American freedoms, including the public's right to know what its government is doing. It would advance the demise of liberty within our borders. And it would make a hollow shell of our arguments that our way of life has something more to offer the world than the Communists'.

No one should be complacent when our security is jeopardized because of the loopholes in an open society. But even more importantly, we should never forget that the price of trying to close every one of those loopholes might be the destruction of the very thing we are trying to protect.